

The President's Daily Brief

19 April 1972

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The ground situation remains relatively quiet throughout most of South Vietnam, while US naval ships operating off North Vietnam are encountering increased harassment. (Page 1)

The Soviets are emphasizing the need for the negotiations in Paris to resume

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(Page 2)

In Laos, North Vietnamese units are continuing to harass irregular positions near Long Tieng

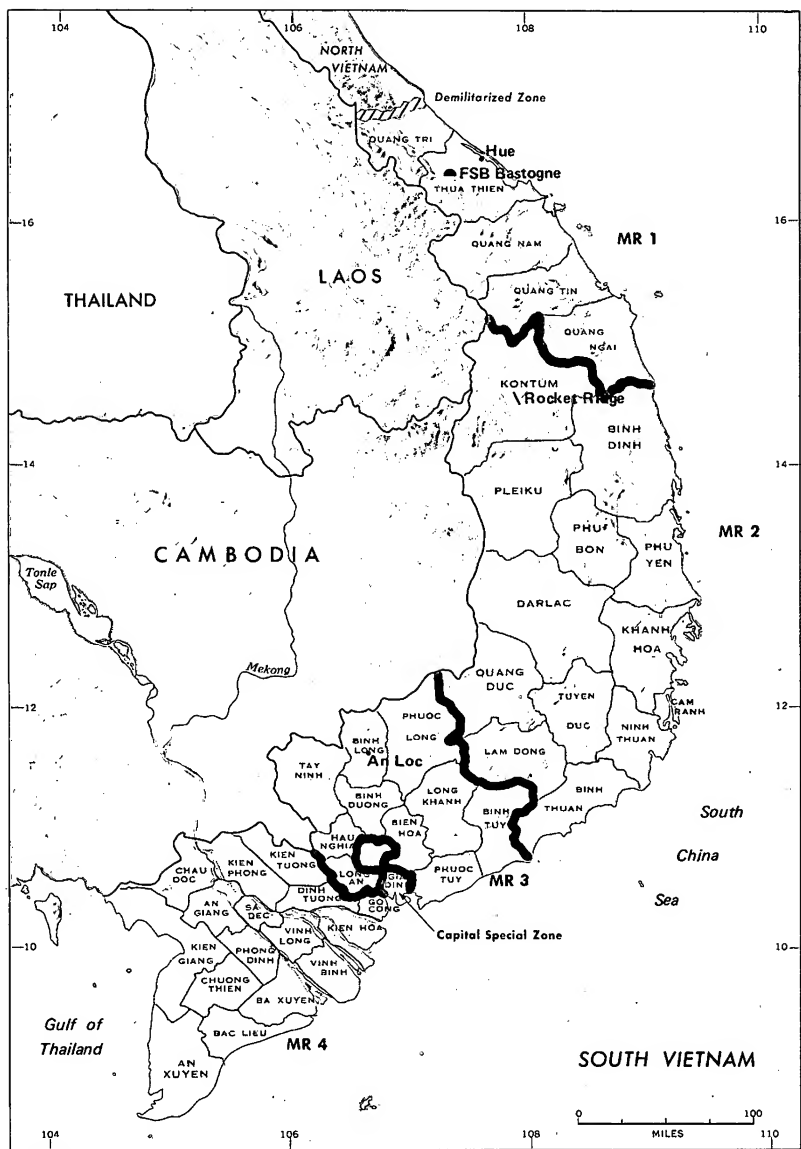
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(Page 3)

A Syrian official claims his government is opposed to a friendship treaty with the USSR, but implies that pressure for such a treaty may be hard to resist. (Page 4)

Criticism of President Lanusse appears to have increased within the Argentine air force and navy. (Page 5)

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VIETNAM

Communist military activity remains light in nearly all parts of South Vietnam, but enemy forces are continuing to prepare for heavier fighting. In Quang Tri Province, photography supports other evidence that the North Vietnamese have moved additional tanks and artillery into forward positions. In adjacent Thua Thien, intercepts suggest that Communist units, while still keeping pressure on Fire Support Base Bastogne west of Hue, may be marking time until tanks that are currently being held up by fuel shortages can move in from the west. In the central highlands, refitting and resupply activity apparently has drawn one North Vietnamese regiment away from government positions on Rocket Ridge. Farther south, Communist units appear to be repositioning around An Loc, but fighting there and in the delta has stabilized for the time being.

In North Vietnam, Communist shore batteries and gunboats are becoming more aggressive in challenging US ships operating off their coast. Gunfire that hit the US destroyer Buchanan off Vinh earlier this week caused extensive damage and a number of casualties. Another destroyer in the same area has been the target of rocket fire, and on Monday a US destroyer sank a motor torpedo boat that approached it south of Vinh.

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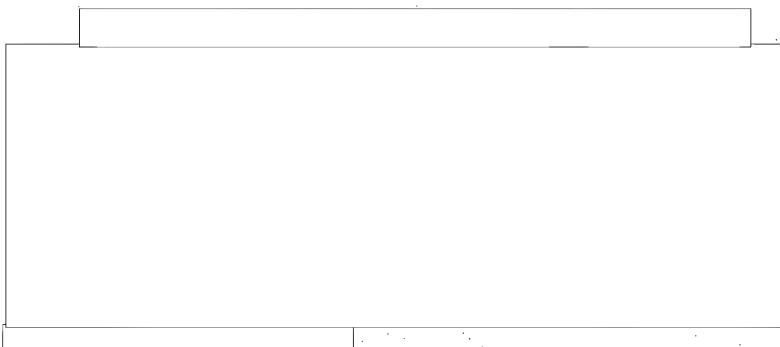
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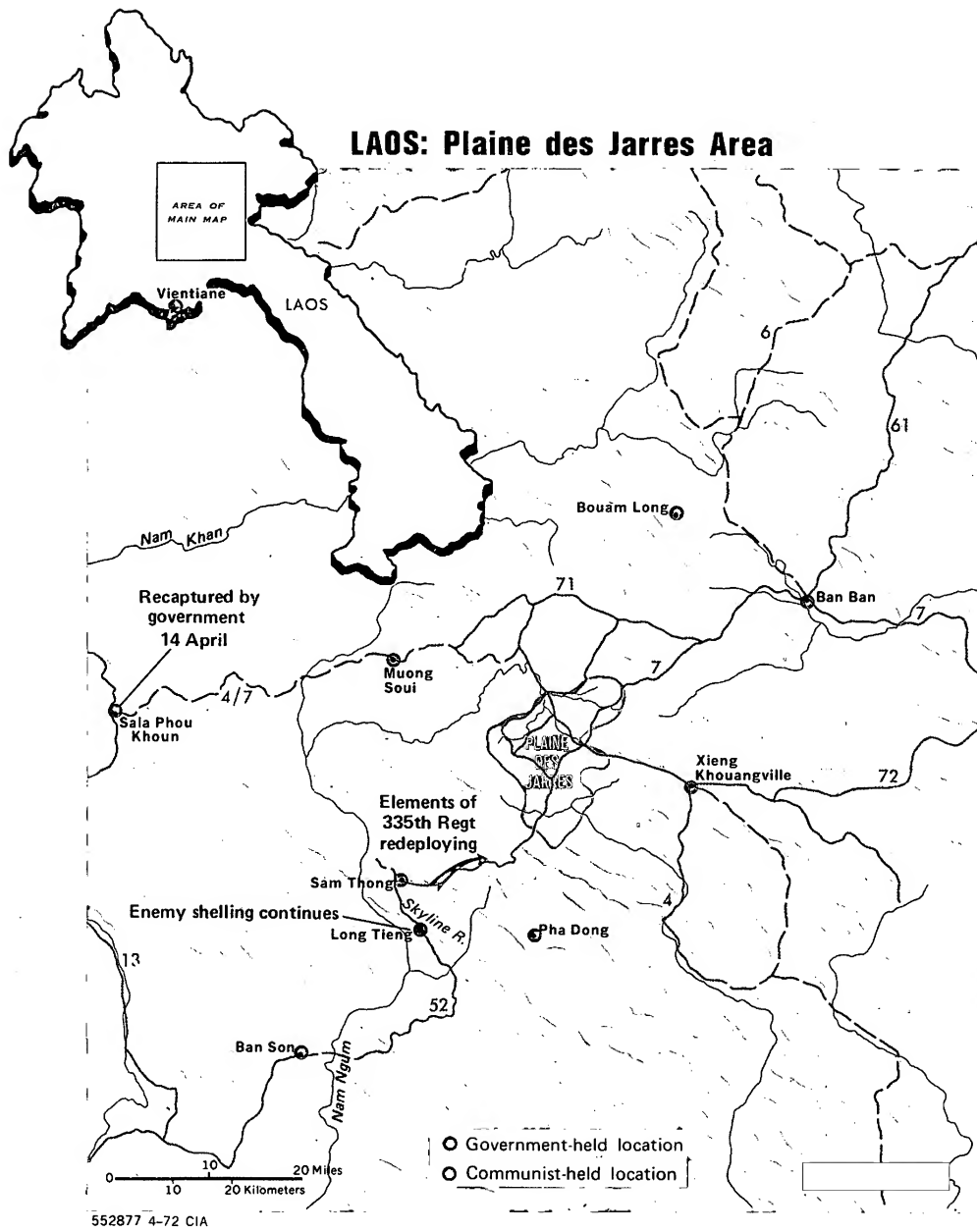
In fact, recent Soviet press coverage of Vietnam has stressed the necessity for a negotiated settlement. The TASS statement on 17 April that protested the bombings also asserted that the "only path for resolving the problems of Indochina was that of negotiations, without attempts at blackmail and dictation." The Soviets have also carried the New York Times editorial of 16 April which stated that the time had come to resume exploratory talks.

Not since the fall of 1970 have official Soviet statements on Vietnam contained such a forthright endorsement of negotiations.

In contrast to the low-key Soviet coverage of a meeting in Moscow with the North Vietnamese chargé

[redacted] Hanoi's version stressed the USSR's commitment to support the Vietnamese on all fronts. A similar difference was noted between Moscow's and Hanoi's coverage of the meetings the North Vietnamese ambassador had on 13 April with Premier Kosygin and Soviet Defense Minister Grechko.

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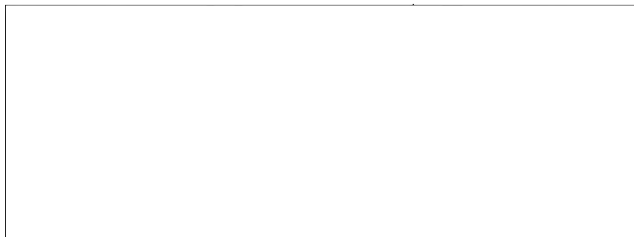
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LAOS

The North Vietnamese are still harassing government positions on Skyline Ridge and in the Long Tieng valley, and they have thwarted recent government attempts to regain control of the three unoccupied strongpoints on the ridge. They have not, however, launched any major attacks in nearly three weeks, and communications intelligence suggests that they may be starting to pull some of their forces back into wet season defensive positions.

Elements of the 335th Regiment, which participated in the campaign against Long Tieng throughout the dry season, have recently moved back to the high ground southwest of the Plaine des Jarres. Headquarters elements of the 209th and 165th regiments have moved from Skyline Ridge to the Sam Thong area, although this could be only a tactical shift. The North Vietnamese have also pulled some heavy weapons, particularly antiaircraft guns, back to fortified positions on the southern periphery of the Plaine.



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West of the Plaine des Jarres, Lao Army troops are strengthening their hold on Sala Phou Khoun, which they recaptured on 14 April. The Pathet Lao - "Patriotic Neutralist" forces that had previously controlled the town apparently are retreating eastward.

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SYRIA-USSR

A Syrian Foreign Ministry official told the Italian diplomat who represents US interests in Damascus that the Syrian Government is opposed in principle to concluding a friendship treaty with Moscow. He claimed, however, that the recent USSR-Iraq agreement had strengthened the position of those within the Syrian Government who favored such a treaty and asked, somewhat cryptically, that the "West" do more to help. He said that the government would prefer to remain nonaligned and is highly critical of the Iraqi treaty on the grounds that it represents a further erosion of "Arab independence."

These statements may be little more than Damascus' way of saying that such a pact is inevitable. They also probably were meant to reassure the US that a friendship treaty with the USSR need not interfere with the currently improved relations between Washington and Damascus.

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ARGENTINA

Criticism of President Lanusse [redacted]

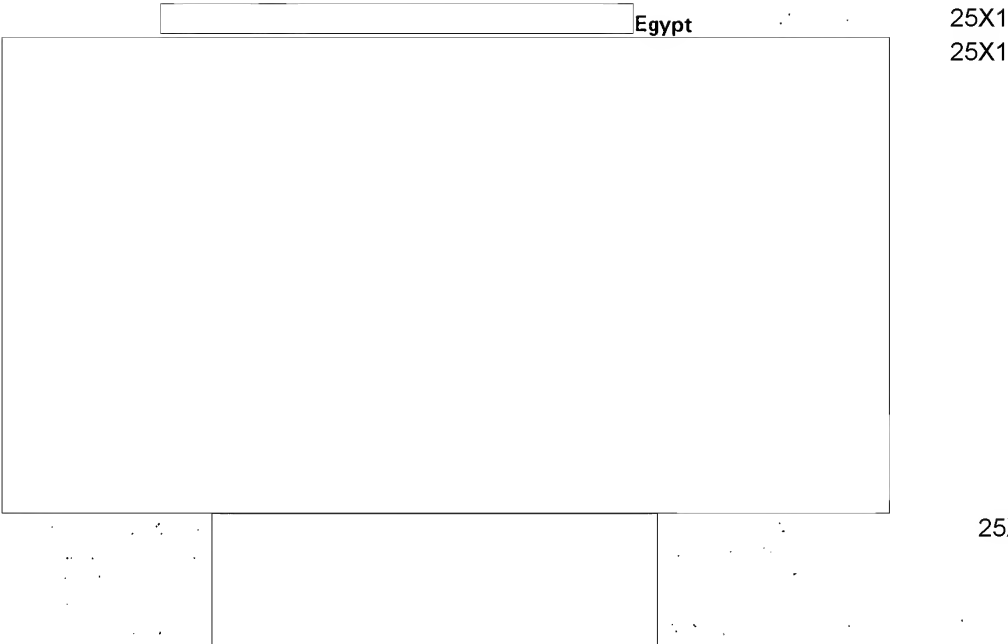
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[redacted] sur-
faced [redacted] in both the air force
and navy in recent days. [redacted]

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The dissension appears to result as much from Lanusse's potential candidacy in the 1973 elections as from the tense security situation. Most of the discontented officers still appear to favor elections, but they fear that Lanusse would do no better in dealing with Argentina's serious economic and social problems as an elected president than he is currently doing as a virtual dictator. Military rumblings are likely to continue, but for now senior army officers appear content to adopt a wait-and-see attitude and malcontents in the navy and air force can do little without army support.



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NOTES

India-Pakistan: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Prime Minister Gandhi has proposed to President Bhutto that preparatory talks begin in Islamabad on 25 April, with a view to a summit meeting in early May. The Indian team is to be headed by D. P. Dhar, chairman of the Policy Planning Commission, and Pakistani negotiators may be announced shortly. In view of Bhutto's receptivity so far, Indian officials seem optimistic over the prospects for a successful meeting and may now be prepared to accept some kind of tacit, rather than explicit, agreement by Bhutto to maintain the status quo in Kashmir.

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USSR-Egypt: [REDACTED]

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Egypt-USSR: [REDACTED]

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